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Steve Van-Hagen

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Chapter 4

“But Genius is the special Gift of God!”: the Reclamation of “Natural Genius” in the Late Eighteenth-Century Verses of Ann Yearsley and James Woodhouse

Steve Van-Hagen

Throughout the eighteenth century, patrons claimed that laboring-class poets were worthy of readers' attention because the latter allegedly possessed “natural genius,” an idea defined and debated by Joseph Addison, Joseph Spence, William Sharpe, Joseph Warton, Edward Young, Alexander Gerard, William Duff, and others.¹ “‘Genius’,” as Tim Burke has observed, is a term “whose highly specialized sense in the eighteenth century has become diluted in our own.”² There are two inter-related aspects of that sense that I wish to examine in this chapter, those of “natural” and “original genius” respectively. “Natural genius,” in the earlier eighteenth century, may be defined within the context of poetry as the signifier for the means by which an uneducated poet, though capable of improvement through reading the Classics, was capable of writing poetry by imitating writers they had received no formal instruction in reading. As the century wore on, and although the two terms were sometimes used interchangeably, “natural” genius was increasingly supplanted by the more radical concept of “original genius.” The aesthetic theory of “original genius” held that no reading of prior literature was desirable for the poets who possessed it, and

even that reading earlier writers may harm their talent.³ As Jonathan Bate neatly summarizes, after the publication of Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* in 1759, "The two very different concepts of poetry bequeathed to the modern world by the ancients, imitation and inspiration, are no longer viewed as complementary. The second is now pre-eminent" (180).

Typically, the result of being promoted as a "natural genius," both before and after Romanticism notionally glamorized its later, "original" variant, included publication of an introduction to a subscription volume of the poet's verses written by their middle or upper-class patron apologizing for the poet's deficiencies. A modern critic such as Dustin Griffin, who clearly views "natural genius" as a positive rubric that allowed for the assimilation of laboring-class poets into eighteenth-century culture, suggests that without such enabling patronage these poets would never have come to public notice.⁴ Betty Rizzo suggests, alternatively, that such patronage was not as beneficent as Griffin suggests, and that writers patronized and promoted in this way were instead:

... so humble, so much less resourceful and independent, altogether more tractable, than such personages as Pope and Johnson. In fact, they made splendid household pets who could fawn in words. It was scarcely of consequence to their patrons that, confined to eternal gratitude, they were effectually muzzled, incapable of developing their own voices ... While better-known writers excoriated patronage, the natural poets exhausted their breath celebrating it. They upheld the ancient order: they knew their

places -- which were as low as the places of poets ought to be; and they
kissed feet. (242)

Rizzo's view comes closer to the modern critical consensus. John Goodridge, although expressing himself in more measured terms than Rizzo, aptly summarizes this consensus by suggesting that "the prevailing model of 'natural genius' seemed to deny ... [labouring-class poets] ... both agency and achievement, while praising their work for all the wrong reasons" ("General Editor's Introduction" to *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, iv). Despite the scholarly attention given to these questions, as William J. Christmas has argued, "What has gone largely unexamined ... is the plebeian poets' counter-manipulation of the cultural tropes surrounding natural genius to serve their own interests" (*Lab'ring Muses* 27--28). No moderately experienced reader of criticism about poetry of the period could deny that Robert Burns' comparatively well-known "Epistle to J. L*****k, an old Scotch bard, 1 April 1785" has, for example, received consistent critical attention. However, while recent studies have discussed questions of "natural genius" as they affected late-century poets,⁵ works by English laboring-class poets of the period that specifically complicate and answer back to the limitations of "natural genius" as a trope have been relatively overlooked. This chapter, therefore, will attempt to redress this deficit by arguing for the reappropriation and reclamation of "natural genius" in the late-century poems of Ann Yearsley (1753--1806), and James Woodhouse (1735--1820).⁶

Yearsley and Woodhouse are prolific poets sometimes compared as perpetrators of the two most spectacular laboring-class rebellions against polite patrons in the late 1780s. Yearsley's revolt against Hannah More is better known than Woodhouse's against Elizabeth Montagu. Since the former was the more public rupture of the two, it has attracted much critical discussion in recent decades.⁷ Yet the *works* of Yearsley and Woodhouse have been discussed directly alongside each other relatively infrequently.⁸ I will concentrate here on Yearsley's "To Mr ****, an Unlettered Poet, on Genius Unimproved" and "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients" and Woodhouse's pseudonymous autobiographical epic *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*. By the century's end, these poems suggest, laboring-class poets unhesitatingly manipulated and answered back to the conventions of "natural genius" for their own political, religious, aesthetic, and ethical ends. Both poets, in their different ways, also attempt their counter-manipulation of the discourse of "natural genius" as part of wider theological projects. Yet there are unavoidable dissimilarities in their methods. *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* was a poem that Woodhouse did not publish, and perhaps never intended to publish in its entirety during his lifetime. Written sometime after 1788--9, following Woodhouse's final estrangement from Montagu, the poem's reclamation of "natural genius" is intertwined with the radical, evangelical philosophy he espoused by this point. Yearsley's two poems, by contrast, reflect her complex situation at the time of their publication in her second volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*

(1787), after her public split from Hannah More. They seem squarely to contradict one another in the view they present of the poet's attitude towards "natural genius." At least one of the poems therefore must contradict More's established position on Yearsley's status as a "natural genius." Both Yearsley's and Woodhouse's reclamations of "natural genius" as a positive descriptor help us to understand their cultural, social, and ideological positions at the time they wrote these works. More than this, the poems encourage us to reconfigure our ideas about how laboring-class poets interacted with the conventions of their promotion to the reading public, and about how they responded to those conventions.

Yearsley was baptised Ann Cromartie on Clifton Hill, Bristol, in 1753. Her mother, though a milkseller, taught her daughter to read, borrowing books from travelling libraries to further the latter's education. In 1774, the poet married John Yearsley, a day laborer. She bore him six children over the next ten years, two of whom did not survive infancy. She helped to support them by selling milk door to door, like her mother before her. In the winter of 1783--4, a number of disasters befell the Yearsleys and they became destitute. At a time of food shortages they stubbornly (and arguably foolishly) refused to take advantage of parish charity and, having lost their accommodation, took refuge in a disused farm on the outskirts of Bristol. Yearsley's mother died, and the poet was in danger of her own life, before the charitable Richard Vaughan inadvertently found and saved the family.⁹ One of those to buy milk from Yearsley was Hannah More's cook, who showed her mistress some of Yearsley's work. Supported by the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu, More enlisted national support for a

subscription of Yearsley's work, and *Poems on Several Occasions* was published by Thomas Cadell in June 1785. The volume was wildly successful, attracting more than a thousand subscribers, but public disagreement and schism followed. More and Yearsley quarrelled about the latter's access to the proceeds from the volume, and about Yearsley's intentions to embark upon a poetic career. Dropped by Cadell, with the aid of new patrons Yearsley found an alternative publisher in G. G. and J. Robinson. Yearsley's second volume was published two years later, though subscriptions were barely a third of those of her predecessor volume. Nonetheless, Yearsley went on to enjoy an extended publishing career, including another volume of verse, *The Rural Lyre* (1796), a novel and several plays. In later life she ran a mobile library.

There is a chapter devoted to Yearsley in probably the most comprehensive examination yet undertaken of the relation of laboring-class poets to "natural genius," a Ph.D. thesis by Jefferson Matthew Carter, *The Unletter'd Muse: The Uneducated Poets and the Concept of Natural Genius in Eighteenth-Century England*. Arguing that "[t]he Classical view of natural genius -- that learning is essential to the innately gifted poet -- dominates poetics from the time of Pindar to the age of Jonson," he suggests that "[t]he radical concept of natural genius -- that learning impedes inborn genius -- develops during the early eighteenth century and prevails in English critical thought after mid-century" (v). Carter associates this late-century "radical concept of natural genius" with the alternative term "original genius" and argues that More promoted Yearsley as a

post-Young “original” genius, who was deliberately protected from Classical reading and learning so as not to ruin her “natural” gifts (see Carter, vi--vii).

Read alongside one another, Yearsley’s poems on “natural genius” seem ambiguous and inconsistent. Carter’s reading of More’s promotion of Yearsley, however, makes possible the view that in “To Mr ****, an Unlettered Poet, on Genius Unimproved,” Yearsley was satirically parroting her former patron in advancing “the radical view [of] the 1780s.” This might imply that “Addressed to Ignorance,” against our expectations of what might initially seem the more conservative poem of the two, was a rebellion against More, arguing that the more desirable identity was that of “natural,” or “improved” genius. There are other impulses and influences at work in the poems, however, especially in “To Mr ****.” Once laboring poets began to invoke religion to support their right to greater political and social equality,¹⁰ and their right to write verse, reclaiming “natural genius” as a positive (self-) descriptor was a logical consequence. The obvious benefit of being a “natural” genius was that the term implied a gift given by a God of mercy whose worship entailed a doctrine that held potential for greater social and political equality for the laboring classes. In “To Mr ****,” Yearsley advocates the supremacy of “natural” (or, within Carter’s definitions, “original”) genius over Classical learning:

Ne’er hail the fabled Nine, or snatch rapt Thought
From the Castalian spring; ’tis not for *thee*,
From embers, where the Pagan’s light expires,

To catch a flame divine. From one bright spark
 Of never-erring Faith, more rapture beams
 Than wild Mythology could ever boast.

.....

What are the Muses, or Apollo's strains,
 But harmony of soul? Like thee, estrang'd
 From Science, and old Wisdom's classic lore,
 I've patient trod the wild entangled path
 Of unimprov'd Idea. Dauntless Thought
 I eager seiz'd, no formal Rule e'er aw'd;
 No Precedent controul'd; no Custom fix'd
 My independent spirit: on the wing
 She still shall guideless soar, nor shall the Fool,
 Wounding her pow'rs, e'er bring her to the ground. (19--24, 33--42)¹¹

While the poem is clear that Classical learning is not for the “natural genius,” the speaker also explicitly identifies herself with the addressee (“Like Thee”).¹² Both Christmas and Waldron¹³ emphasize the Romantic privileging of inspiration and intuition over formal education, but it is surely important that the first verse paragraph (19--24) above emphasizes that Christian faith is the source of poetic inspiration. Likewise, the (unstated) implication of the subsequent verse paragraph (33--42) is that Yearsley is thus religiously inspired. If autodidacts

could not compete on level terms with their educated counterparts in Classical learning, one solution was to shift the criteria one had to meet in order to be considered a poet. An emphasis on New Testament theology, with its worship of the servant king, offered an opportunity for the laboring classes to lay claim to the identity of “poet” -- via “natural genius” -- that was unavailable to writers from more privileged backgrounds.¹⁴ Even scholars who have been interested primarily in the limitations upon women poets of the models provided by the “genius” debates have consistently seen “To Mr. *****” as establishing a resistant voice.¹⁵

Mindful that in an age in which presenting oneself to the public as a “natural genius” still invited condescension from the critics, Yearsley attacks the problem from a different perspective in “Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman’s desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients.” Here, unlike in “To Mr. *****,” she defiantly boasts her Classical learning. Waldron suggests that “Addressed to Ignorance” demonstrates that “To Mr *****” is ironic, since the former comes much closer to Yearsley’s characteristically satirical, prickly tone. This impression is only strengthened if one accepts Waldron’s reading that Yearsley’s poetry and letters elsewhere generally suggest she expended no little effort in trying to dispel notions of herself as plebeian.¹⁶

“Addressed to Ignorance,” like “To Mr. *****” a verse epistle, is written in a traditional, though elaborate meter of trochaic lines of either eleven or twelve syllables, alternating with eights or nines -- the meter, like the learning, designed to refute the suggestion that the speaker and addressee were not competent to read

and write “Classical” verse. Yearsley tells Ignorance that “Lactilla and thou must be friends” (8) and laments, with equal irony, that she is forbidden to “feed on the scraps of the Sage” (14) before listing everything that “Fancy” shows her. What follows is presumably intended as a virtuoso display of Classical learning, as she alludes to thirty-three different Classical figures or places within the space of forty-one lines.¹⁷ Via allusions to Voltaire and Wat Tyler, the poem ends with the feisty rejoinder:

Here’s Trojan, Athenian, Greek, Frenchman and I,
 Heav’n knows what I was long ago;
 No matter, thus shielded, this age I defy,
 And the next cannot wound me, I know.¹⁸

This seems very much like the confrontational tone frequently found in Yearsley’s writing after her breach with More. The latter had first introduced Yearsley to the reading public in “A Prefatory Letter to Mrs. Montagu. By a Friend” from *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785) in which More claimed that Yearsley’s reading had been very limited. “Addressed to Ignorance” also gives the lie to these claims (unless Yearsley acquired a great deal in a very short time). It is tempting to see the two poems, considered together, as Yearsley’s attempts to experiment with or rehearse alternative counter-arguments to (different) assumptions that would deny her the status of poet. Free of More, Yearsley flirts with the identities of both “original genius” and the “natural genius” improved by

Classical learning, trying on for size the advantages and disadvantages of both. Ultimately, however, the precise nature of the relation between the two poems remains difficult to resolve, all the more so because the theological content of “To Mr. ****” is in keeping with the wider theological concerns of Yearsley’s second volume, also seen in poems such as “On Jephthah’s Vow taken in a Literal Sense.”¹⁹ It is difficult, therefore, to see “To Mr. ****” as being straightforwardly satirical, or as only satire.

James Woodhouse experienced a rise to fame in some ways quite different from Yearsley’s, given that his backstory lacked the latter’s compelling hardships. Woodhouse began working life as an apprentice cordwainer, later becoming a carrier between Rowley Regis and London, and then a schoolteacher. In 1759 he addressed two elegies to his neighbor William Shenstone, the poet and landscape gardener. The two men became friends and Shenstone initiated plans for a subscription volume of Woodhouse’s verse that were seen to completion by publishers Robert and James Dodsley, after Shenstone’s death in 1763. Woodhouse’s *Poems on Sundry Occasions* appeared the following year, although it was the expanded *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1766 that marked the high point of Woodhouse’s fame. Patronized now by Edward and Elizabeth Montagu, and by George, Lord Lyttleton, the volume was dedicated to the latter. As would be the case with Yearsley’s *Poems on Several Occasions* nineteen years later, subscribers to Woodhouse’s breakthrough volume included a range of noteworthy nobles and writers of the day.²⁰ At this point Woodhouse went to work for the Montagus, remaining in the employ of Elizabeth after Edward died in 1775. He

published nothing new until a second (different) *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1788, after an acrimonious final break from his surviving patron. During his final decades, with the assistance of James Dodsley, Woodhouse became a successful stationer, bookseller and printer. He subsequently published *Norbury Park, and Other Poems* (1803), *Love Letters to my Wife* (1804, though, like its predecessor volume, written in 1789) and at least one anonymous (brief) selection from a 28,013-line epic autobiography, *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (hereafter *Crispinus Scriblerus*) in 1814. Following Woodhouse's death from a street accident in 1820, his complete *The Life and Poetical Works* -- containing the whole of *Crispinus Scriblerus* -- was not published for another seventy-six years.²¹

While a number of commentators have touched on Woodhouse's life, work, and career in the light of contemporary conceptions of "natural genius," in passing at least,²² Carter again provides arguably its most comprehensive examination. The latter argues for the view that Woodhouse's early publications present him as a "natural genius," whose talents were supplemented by Classical reading and learning (see Carter 184). The question of whether or not Carter is ultimately correct is a complex one that arguably extends beyond the remit of the present chapter;²³ but the view Carter advances of Woodhouse's early work and promotion to the public is, at the least, plausible. Carter contends that "The works which best illuminate the aesthetic background against which Woodhouse's contemporary reputation should be studied are Warton's essay, Young's *Conjectures*, and the writings of Duff," (164) maintaining that Woodhouse

himself accepted that supposedly “natural genius” should be augmented by reading recommended by a patron. Carter further suggests that this was an absolutely conventional view in the 1760s, stemming from a not-entirely consistent mixture of the writings of Addison and Warton (164). In Duff’s *Critical Observations* (as Carter summarizes) “Original genius is the highest degree of innate genius; perhaps the inborn genius exhibited by a poet like Woodhouse was enough to guarantee his contemporary notoriety, if not a reputation for original genius” (169). It becomes significant, therefore, that “natural” (rather than the newer term, “original”) genius continues to be ascribed to the laboring-class poets after Duff’s work, since the descriptor “natural genius” thereafter became associated with a lesser talent. Hence Carter suggests that Shenstone was safe to lend Woodhouse his books because, unlike an “original genius,” a “natural genius” “would not be harmed by cultivating his (lesser) talents” (172).

Although Carter suggests that only “a few passages” of Woodhouse’s work “verge[d] on the radical view of natural genius” (184), this is not true of late work such as *Crispinus Scriblerus*. In the latter, written while Woodhouse was inspired by the evangelical, egalitarian Methodism that seems to have been part of the reason for his final break from Elizabeth Montagu, Woodhouse claims, manipulates and answers back to a number of the conventions surrounding “natural genius.” He does so as part of a wider theological project that castigates the privileged and powerful as hypocrites who oppress the weak, neglected, and poor, suggesting that the former will deny themselves the Grace of a just and

merciful God through their disregard for New Testament teachings. Peter Denney, not unaptly, states that *Crispinus Scriblerus* expresses “a strange form of radical Evangelicalism, which oscillated between righteous wrath and irreverent wit, being anti-clerical, anti-monarchical, solemn, pious, scornful and levelling” (“Popular Radicalism” 64). Woodhouse’s late (re)appropriation of natural genius can only be fully understood not just within the contexts of eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, but within parallel foci upon both political and theological contexts.

Arguably one of the reasons why Carter concludes that “the Shoemaker-Poet’s characteristic attitude toward himself was classical” is that the presentation of Woodhouse as a “natural genius” in the prefatory “Advertisement” to *Poems on Sundry Occasions* (1764) was conventional, and Woodhouse’s 1760s poetical self-presentations (to some extent) reflect its content. Apart from attributing acquired learning to Woodhouse, otherwise “The Advertisement” contains all of the signifiers that motivate the modern critical suspicion of conventional eighteenth-century depictions of “natural genius” that Goodridge was quoted summarizing earlier. “The Advertisement” contains a four-and-a-half-page account of Shenstone’s kindness and generosity to Woodhouse by helping him as much as he could, and about Woodhouse’s apparent gratitude.²⁴ Woodhouse is constructed as a poet who believes in the desirability, and even the necessity of improvement, and yet the agency for this improvement is ascribed more to Shenstone than to Woodhouse. In *Poems on Several Occasions* (1766) two years later, Woodhouse even apparently contributes “The Author’s Apology” himself,

striking a series of similar-sounding notes.²⁵ “‘The Author’s Apology,’ prefacing his second volume,” Carter argues, “sets the tone for the autobiographical comments in his works ... Like previous uneducated poets, Woodhouse reveres learning and acquired art” (179).

By the 1790s, however, Woodhouse’s works were making a very different kind of claim to the title of “natural genius.” From the vantage point of Woodhouse’s later, Methodist worldview, this “naturalness” implied a gift given directly, and purposely, by an Evangelical God of mercy whose worship entailed adherence to a doctrine that promoted the potential for laboring-class social and political equality. A long passage in Chapter IV of *Crispinus Scriblerus* that has been reprinted in modern anthologies and editions on several occasions details Woodhouse / Crispinus’s rise to fame in the early-to-mid 1760s, and characterizes the novelties, pressures, opportunities, and limitations of being a laboring-class bard. It is during this extended passage that, while Woodhouse is careful to suggest that most of his patrons acted for the best of motives (the exception is Elizabeth Montagu), he first offers strident criticism of the kind of “improvement” that is possible through acquired learning. Critiquing the kind of verse that was fashionable in the 1760s, he bemoans the imitative style that was expected of a would-be bard:

None could bind couplets -- stanzas twist, and bend,
 Figures, and tropes, at tongue’s and finger’s end,
 But those that folios, learn’d, would frequent thumb,

Whose titles strike rude, English, readers dumb.

None without Latin stilts could stalk sublime,

In bold blank Verse -- or more elaborate Rhyme.²⁶ (IV: 197--202)

Woodhouse builds a two-part argument not just attacking what Carter terms “the classical view” of “natural genius,” that geniuses could be made (or, at least, improved), but agitating in favor of what Carter calls “the radical view”. The former comes first (IV: 257-84). Here the “proud Professors of cold Critic-Bands” (IV: 259) -- Horace, Ben Jonson, Samuel Johnson and perhaps Addison spring to mind -- who maintain that genius could be acquired through learning and development are refuted through mockery, and the classical maxim most associated with natural genius, *poeta nascitur, non fit* (“poets are born, not made”), satirically inverted: “That Poesy’s no more than trick and trade / Its first Proficients not born Bards but made” (IV: 271--2). To think this inversion could be so is, it is suggested, to deny Man his God-given place in the divine creation, and to reduce him to the stature of the animals (IV: 273--82). Typical of the characteristic complication and contradiction of Woodhouse’s polemical argumentation is the fact that he suggests by satirical implication that Pope was as much of a (presumably “original” rather than “natural”) genius as Homer or Milton, as the three of them mourn the pronouncements of the “proud Professors” (IV: 269--70). This was despite the fact that Young, whose ideas in the *Conjectures on Original Composition* Woodhouse seems partly to draw upon here, taxed Pope “with imitation in its most derogatory sense and [hence Young]

sees imitation as a danger to genius” (Carter 167). Not for the only time in reading Woodhouse’s oeuvre we become aware of a conflicted, ambivalent relationship towards the Catholic, conservative Pope on the part of the radical, Methodist poet, who nonetheless admired the radical power and ambition of Scriblerian satire.

In the second half of Woodhouse’s argument (IV: 303--40), he unambiguously stakes his own claim to be thought of as a “natural genius.” Neither the words “natural” nor “original” are used in the passage, which makes it difficult to know how much critical and theoretical reading about the subject Woodhouse had completed. Nonetheless, this passage advocates for the “radical view” of “natural genius,” tempered only by an initial qualification:

Knowledge, and Learning, may supply, in part,

Their needful helps in true poetic Art --

Like crutches, may assist mechanic skill

To hobble round the base of Ida’s hill (IV: 303--6)

Thereafter, however, if anything, Woodhouse describes what Duff would term “original” genius more than its “natural” predecessor. We are left in no doubt that “Genius” is innate, and granted directly, exclusively, from God: “Ev’n Common Sense may with pure Knowledge plod, / But Genius is the special Gift of God!” (331--2). Modern critics including Christmas, Keegan (*Nature Poetry*), and myself have all sought to build an understanding of the power and fervour of Woodhouse’s radical late work. Yet the significance of his reappropriation of

“natural genius” as part of that politico-theological project, not just in his authorial addresses to the public but in his late verse itself, has arguably still not yet been examined in the depth required.²⁷

(Re)reading both Yearsley and Woodhouse, we are conscious that, to some degree, the poems discussed take opposite paths towards their ends; Yearsley answers back to More by claiming what was by the end of the century a venerable concept of an improved “natural genius,” just as Woodhouse embraced the more contemporary, radical alternative of “original genius.” Hence we are reminded, however, of the significance in the period of the stance of a poet from a marginalized background on questions of “natural genius” as a signifier of their complicated cultural, social, and ideological positions. We are reminded, ultimately, that there is still a need to respond positively to Christmas’s call, quoted earlier, to attend to the laboring-class poets’ “counter-manipulation of the cultural tropes surrounding natural genius to serve their own interests.” If we do not, we fall into the trap of merely perpetuating the myth that “natural genius” limited and confined them within straightforwardly damaging and undesirable identities, something that was far from the case by the eighteenth century’s end.

Notes for Chapter Four

1. See, for instance, Joseph Addison in *The Spectator*, no. 160 (Monday 3 September 1711); William Sharpe, *Dissertation on Genius* (London: 1755); Joseph Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (London: M. Cooper, 1756); Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London: A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1759); Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste ... with Three Dissertations on the Same Subject* (Edinburgh: A. Millar, A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1759) and *An Essay on Genius* (London and Edinburgh: W. Strahan, T. Cadell and W. Creech, 1774); William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius; and its Various Modes of Exertion in Philosophy and the Fine Arts, Particularly in Poetry* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1767) and *Critical Observations on the Writings of the most Celebrated Geniuses in Poetry. Being a Sequel to the Essay on Original Genius* (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1770).
2. Tim Burke, "Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture," in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, edited by Thomas Woodman (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 216.
3. For useful overviews of eighteenth-century debates about "natural" (and "original") genius as they were applied to literary questions, see James M. Osborn, "Spence, Natural Genius and Pope," *Philological Quarterly* 45.1 (1966): 123--44; Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*

(London: The Women's Press, 1989), 4--7, 16--17; 33--4; 36--8, 43--7; 71--102; Drummond Bone, "The Emptiness of Genius: Aspects of Romanticism," in *Genius: The History of an Idea*, edited by Penelope Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 113--27; Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 2008), 161--86. See also Jefferson Matthew Carter, "The Unletter'd Muse: The Uneducated Poets and the Concept of Natural Genius in Eighteenth-Century England" (PhD Diss., The University of Arizona, 1972), 6--26; and Tim Burke, "Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture," 215--30 (especially 217--23).

4. See Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage, 1650--1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 189--95.

5. An indirect example of how a laboring-class bard may turn the conventions of "natural genius" to their advantage is discussed, for instance, by Simon White in *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 126--7. See also Daniel Cook, *Thomas Chatterton and Neglected Genius, 1760-1830* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 13--34.

6. One of the exceptions to this rule in addressing questions of how a laboring-class poet of the late-century period responds specifically to the available models of "genius" attends to some of Yearsley's own work; see Burke, "Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture." Burke mostly examines poems other than those under discussion in the present chapter, such as

“On Mrs. Montagu,” “Clifton Hill,” and “Night. To Stella.” The chapter considers how Yearsley responds to the “muting” that is caused for the female laboring-class poet by contemporary definitions of “genius” which seemingly define the concept as exclusively masculine. For a welcome recognition that “not all eighteenth-century laboring-class poets were content to fit the mold of the solitary, artless ‘natural genius,’ or worse, to impersonate the fashions of polite poetry, as many unsympathetic critics suppose,” see Bridget Keegan, “Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 42.3 (2001): 196.

7. For influential accounts of Yearsley’s life and career, and of the relationship and break with More, see Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class and Gender* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 45--90; Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women’s Poetry in Britain, 1739--96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 120--87; Betty Rizzo, “The Patron as Poet-Maker,” 258--62; Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, “The Romantic ‘Peasant’ Poets and their Patrons,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 26.2 (1995): 79--81; Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753--1806* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, 235--66; Julie Cairnie, “The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley: Laboring and Writing, Submission and Resistance,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 27.4 (2005): 353--64; and Kerri Andrews, *Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, Patronage and Poetry* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).

8. An exception is H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985), 5--6, 20--21. Klaus compares Yearsley's and Woodhouse's generic experimentations because both testify "to a greater confidence in their artistic abilities" than was evident in earlier works by laboring-class writers. Bridget Keegan provides another exception by discussing Yearsley at the end of her chapter "Return to the Garden: James Woodhouse and Polite Cultivations" in *British Laboring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730--1837* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 62.
9. For the origin of this much retold account of Yearsley's "discovery," and many other stories about her early life, see Hannah More's "A Prefatory Letter to Mrs. Montagu. By a Friend" in Yearsley's *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Thomas Cadell, 1785), iii--v.
10. For various discussions of these phenomena see Bridget Keegan, "Mysticisms and Mystifications: The Demands of Laboring-Class Religious Poetry," *Criticism* 47.4 (2005): 471--91; Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses*, 203--9; Steve Van-Hagen, "The Poetry of Physical Labour 1730--1800: The Duckian Tradition" (PhD Diss., University of Kent, 2006), 24--7, 97--116, 154--67, 240--55.
11. Ann Yearsley, "To Mr. ****, an Unlettered Poet, On Genius Unimproved," in Yearsley, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1787), 78--80 (ll. 19--24, 33--42).

12. The addressee has not been definitively identified. Scholars have suggested possibilities such as the autodidact poets John Frederick Bryant (1753--91) and William Job (*fl.* 1785--90), both of whom hailed from Yearsley's native Bristol.

13. See Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses*, 253; and Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, 152.

14. On Yearsley and religion, see Waldron, 18--19, 128--9. Waldron notes that "the power of dissent in Bristol" was strong, though is unaware of Yearsley's "allegiance to any particular group." Nonetheless, she asserts that Yearsley "was certainly firmly set against the idea of a vindictive God and to some extent anthropomorphism in general" (129).

15. See Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 126; and Burke, "Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture," 228.

16. See Waldron, 3--6, 16--17, 24--5, 46--78. For further discussion of such readings, see Frank Felsenstein, "Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive," parts 1 and 2, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21.2 (2000): 346--92 and 22.1 (2003): 13--56; Cairnie, "The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley."

17. These allusions are to Pythagoras, Homer, Ilium, Nestor, Achilles, Ulysses, Menelaus, Paris, the river Salmacis, Zeno, Tibullus, Socrates, Diogenes, Plato, Lycurgus, Tyburn, Longinus, Helicon, Virgil, Hesiod, Ovid, Horace, Penelope, Helen, Sparta, Democritus, Solon, Pliny, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Egysthus, Ajax and Troy.

18. Ann Yearsley, "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients," in Yearsley, *Poems on Various Subjects*, 99 (ll. 69--72).
19. For "On Jephthah's Vow taken in a Literal Sense" see *Poems on Various Subjects*, 131--38. See also Waldron, 162--5.
20. See James Woodhouse, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Mills, 1766), which contains two pages listing Woodhouse's one hundred and nine "Benefactors," and a further six pages listing the nearly three hundred "Subscribers."
21. *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, edited by Rev. Reginald Illingworth Woodhouse (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1896), 2 vols.
22. For critical treatments of Woodhouse and his work since the 1980s, see H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing*, 1--21; Betty Rizzo, "The Patron as Poet-Maker," 254--8; Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, "The Romantic 'Peasant' Poets and their Patrons," 78--9; William J. Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses*, 183--207; Bridget Keegan, "Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century," 210--12; Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837*, 37--64; Peter Denney, "'Unpleasant, tho' Arcadian Spots': Plebeian Poetry, Polite Culture, and the Sentimental Economy of the Landscape Park," *Criticism* 47.4 (2005): 505--10; Denney, "Popular Radicalism, Religious Parody and the Mock Sermon in the 1790s," *History Workshop* 74 (2012): 64; Van-Hagen, "The Life, Works and Reception of an Evangelical Radical: James Woodhouse (1735--1820), the

- ‘Poetical Shoemaker’,” *Literature Compass* 6.2 (2009): 384--406; Van-Hagen, “Patrons, Influences, and Poetic Communities in James Woodhouse’s *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*,” in *Social Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century: Clubs, Salons and Textual Coterie*s, edited by Ileana Baird (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014), 309--33; and Sandro Jung, “Shenstone, Woodhouse, and Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetics: Genre and the Elegiac-Pastoral Landscape,” *Philological Quarterly* 88.1-2 (2009): 127--49.
23. On the complexities of Woodhouse’s identities in his early life and work, and on the importance of sociability in these questions, see Van-Hagen, “Patrons, Influences, and Poetic Communities in James Woodhouse’s *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*.”
24. “The Advertisement,” in James Woodhouse, *Poems on Sundry Occasions* (London: Richardson and Clark, 1764), iii--vii.
25. “The Author’s Apology,” in James Woodhouse, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1766), v--viii.
26. The text is taken from *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, vol. 1, 69. Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Subsequent citations are from this edition, and line references are given after quotations in the main text.
27. See Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, 196, for his reading of Woodhouse’s “Address” in 1788’s *Poems on Several Occasions*, which the former reads as “a plea for social mobility based on innate, God-given talent -- Woodhouse’s ‘inclination.’” For Christmas, the “opportunity” to make such a plea is “Implicit

within eighteenth-century conceptions of natural genius,” the chance “to escape the condescending support that defines polite patronage of natural genius.”